

## Sins of the Tongue: Illustrations from Jas 3:1-11: Horses, Ships, Fire, Snakes, & Wells; Discord Reveals Spiritual Adolescence; Chafer on Broken Fellowship

**James 3:1** - My fellow believers, stop becoming teachers, knowing that we shall take on ourselves a more severe judgment.

PRINCIPLE: Do not entertain the idea of usurping the authority of the pastor. If you are in a teaching position in Prep School make sure you are communicating the theology and doctrine that is developed from this pulpit. Certain literature from the writings of R. B. Thieme, Jr., has been approved for the teaching of basic doctrines to Senior Prep School students. Verbalizing objections to what is taught from the pulpit is sowing discord.

**James 3:2** - Now we all commit sins. If anyone does not sin in what he says, the same mature believer is able to control his entire body.

PRINCIPLE: If you do not sin in what you say then you have control of your tongue which means you also have control of your entire body. Illustrations follow, the first being that of a horse in:

**James 3:3** - Now if we thrust the bit of the horses into their mouths that they may obey us we change the directions of their entire bodies as well.

PRINCIPLE: Just as the rider controls a big, strong animal such as a horse by means of a small bit in his mouth, so also the believer controls his entire body by controlling his tongue. What the tongue of the believer says determines the content of his soul.

**James 3:4** - Behold also ships, being so large, and propelled under the influence of strong winds, yet are directed under the influence of a very small rudder to whatever direction the will of the captain determines.

PRINCIPLE: Huge seagoing vessels may be controlled by the captain's manipulation of a small rudder. So also may the human body by the control or lack of control of the tongue. As the ship goes in whatever direction the captain determines, so goes the body of the believer, either for good or for evil.

**James 3:5** - In this way the tongue is a small part of the body, but keeps on boasting great things. Observe how such a small fire burns up such a large forest!

PRINCIPLE: The fires started by sins of the tongue can burn up an entire congregation. Gossip, maligning, judging, and accusations set fires. If you have a problem with a fellow believer then go to that person and resolve the issue. Before the sun sets (Ephesians 4:26)! For a thorough analysis of this issue you should reference the recordings of the 1998 Shreveport Bible Conference: *From Impulsive Anger to Gracious Acts*.

**James 3:6** - The tongue is a fire, the means of cosmic wickedness. It is placed in the structure of the anatomy as that which contaminates the entire body, setting on fire the cycles of mental-attitude, verbal, and overt sins, being set on fire by the agency of Gehenna [ γέεννα, **geenna**, refers to demon influence ].

PRINCIPLE: Demon influence contaminates the soul. The tongue expresses what is found in the soul and this effects the entire body. These are expressions that reveal contamination in the soul. Prolonged, these thoughts contaminate the physical body. The fire of the tongue starts a cycle of evil: mental-attitude sins, verbal sins, and overt sins cycle and repeat themselves to the point of self-destruction.

**James 3:7** - For every species of animals, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of sea creatures, is controlled, and has been controlled by the human species.

PRINCIPLE: Mankind has historically utilized animals for his benefit, whether for food, work, protection, or pleasure. Man has devised from his soul how to control these beasts of the lower creation but is unable to control his own tongue.

**James 3:8** - But no one is able to control the tongue, a restless evil full of deadly venom.

PRINCIPLE: Of the animals mentioned in verse seven, the reptile, specifically the snake, is able to inflict pain, illness, and death by using its fangs to inject venom into its victim. This is the image presented by James of the person whose tongue becomes the source of destroying a congregation. It is an easy thing to use the tongue but used without control ignites a flame that can destroy a church.

**James 3:9** - By means of the tongue we praise the Lord and the Father; and by means of the tongue we keep on damaging others, those who have been made in the likeness of God.

PRINCIPLE: The tongue can be used to express both good and evil, the latter directed toward those who were created in the image of God and fellow members of the royal family.

**James 3:10** - Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. Fellow believers, there is no need for these things to be happening.

PRINCIPLE: This is mental instability in the spiritual life. This person's soul does not have control of his tongue, the sin nature does. It expresses residence in the cosmic system and involvement in the reversionistic spiral in which the same fountain produces both fresh and bitter water, a paradox expressed next by James in:

**James 3:11** - Does the well send out from the same opening both sweet and bitter water?

PRINCIPLE: James poses a rhetorical question to illustrate an obvious fact. The natural world is consistent in that, for example, a well contains either sweet water or bitter water, not both. The reversionist on the other hand is extremely inconsistent and can produce both and expresses this instability of soul through the tongue. Such soul instability implies an incapacity for remaining in a fixed position or maintaining a steady course and indicates a lack of emotional balance.

- 1) When believers associate together they must resolve to be flexible, understanding, and patient. “We all commit sins” (James 3:2a). Catching someone committing sins enables some to have a field day at their expense while ignoring the fact that their verbal free-for-all is an even greater sin than the one they enjoy reciting.
- 2) The local church is where people should gather to do better, to improve, and to make the advance. To be diverted by trivial tiffs is equivalent to turning the church into a high school where self-absorbed adolescents arrogantly attempt to advance themselves at the expense of others. It is childish and it is not honoring to the Lord.
- 3) Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer addressed this issue in his *Systematic Theology*:

The New Testament exhorts to unity, to unbroken fellowship, and to brotherly love; but these have been neglected and rejected. The obligation to remain in fellowship, even when controversy arises, has been forsaken and often over exceedingly small issues.<sup>1</sup>

- 4) Our translation in Hebrews 10 looks like this:

**Hebrews 10:24** - Let us consider [ present active subjunctive of κατανοέω, *katanoeō* ] how to encourage one another from the source of virtue love and from the source of divine good production.

**v. 25** - Stop forsaking [ present active participle of εγκαταλείπω, *enkataleipō* ] the assembling of ourselves together [ ἐπισυναγωγή, *episunagōgē* ], as is the habit of certain ones, but encourage each other [ present active participle of παρακαλέω, *parakaleō* ], and all the more [ καὶ τοσούτω μᾶλλον, *kai tosoutōi mallon*: Classical Greek phrase for extreme emphasis: “with even greater effort” ] as you see the day [ ἡμέρα, *hēmera*: the Rapture or physical death ] approaching.

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:147.